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ABSTRACT

This research project, called Charger Connection, was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of a pilot transition program for incoming high school freshmen at Elkhart Memorial High School (Indiana). The Charger Connection class was developed to help students overcome problems associated with the transition from middle school to high school. Problems identified include a lack of academic preparedness, indifference toward homework assignments, and lack of appropriate study skills. One-third of incoming freshmen were randomly assigned to Charger Connection classes, which met during a study period. Teachers used the class to develop a "team" relationship with members of the class and to check on student grades and progress. They helped students learn to use their student handbook and to organize themselves. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Students in the Charger Connection had more positive results on a survey measuring adjustment to school. Qualitative results were also positive; however, some suggestions for improvements were made. Teachers felt that the orientation lessons were most helpful and made suggestions for changes. Improvements are planned in scheduling and in revision to interactive and relevant activities for the class. The syllabus, freshman survey results, and student and teacher surveys are appended. (EMK)

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EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CHARGER CONNECTION CLASS

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Y511

April 22, 1999

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EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CHARGER CONNECTION CLASS

This research project, called Charger Connection, was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot transition program for freshman. Charger Connection classes were filled by a random group of incoming freshmen students in the 1998-99 school year at Elkhart Memorial High School. The random group was created through a computer selection of every third freshman.

The Charger Connection class developed because teachers of freshmen observed several attitudinal and behavioral problems with the incoming freshmen specifically. The transition from middle school to high school created some unique problems for incoming freshmen. Some of these same problems were identified in Hertzog and Morgan's (1998) research in "Breaking the Barriers between Middle School and High School"

- A lack of academic preparation
- Indifference toward homework assignments
- A lack of appropriate study skills

Additionally, teachers at Elkhart Memorial High School also identified problems with students' accountability in regards to their actions, learning, and social skills. These negatives result in an overall struggle with the transition to high school.

Incoming students are often unprepared for the rigors of high school subjects. In addition, they are often unfamiliar with the consequences of failure. Another major change for students lies in the attendance policy. High school attendance policies are mandated by the state and are much more strict than middle school attendance policies.

The shift from a somewhat non-restrictive middle-level expectation to a consequential system of attendance, in which students can pass a class but still lose credit for truancy, is an obstacle for some freshmen. Still another problem for incoming freshmen is facing a new social environment. Freshmen can be placed in classes with much older students and often experience a variety of new emotions including: intimidation, insecurity, and fear.

Bridging the gap between middle-level education to the less student-centered high-school environment is important. In "From Middle School to High School: Ease the Transition," Hertzog and Morgan suggest that students undergo "a considerable amount of stress and anxiety during this transition" (1997). For student success, it is imperative to ease that transition between middle school and high school. Morgan and Hertzog found in 1997 that "the manner in which students make this transition between the middle level school and the high school has been seen as a predictor of student success in grade 9" (29). Their research indicated that students made a better transition to high school if the school had at least three transition programs in place. Elkhart Memorial High School has several of these transition programs in place:

- High school counselors visit middle schools to help with scheduling in February and March;
- Elkhart Memorial High School hosts a parent night for parents of 8th grade students entering high school in the fall;
- Elkhart Memorial High School also hosts a co-curricular fair on parent night with displays highlighting academic choices; and
- Eighth grade students make field trips to tour the high school in the spring.

Charger Connection Design

High schools around the country are beginning to recognize the problems incoming freshmen face. A Pueblo, Colorado high school found success in helping students make the transition to high school by instituting a study skills program (Panteleo 31). In March of 1998, Elkhart Memorial High School had an in-service program on a school to work initiative in Michigan. One program that helped students make a good transition in this Niles, Michigan high school was a freshman orientation class. From this information, a group of Elkhart Memorial High School teachers gathered and developed the outline for the Charger Connection class, a class designed to aid in the transition from middle school to high school for Elkhart Memorial freshmen students.

The goal for the Charger Connection class was simple: To provide a positive transition for students entering high school. This goal was supported by three strategies: to help students acclimate within the organization and community of Memorial High School; to provide students with a model of setting and achieving long term career goals; and to acquaint students with the social skills necessary to succeed in both a school and work environment.

The teachers designed several lessons and activities to help achieve these goals (See Charger Connection Syllabus in Appendix A). Administrators, students, sports and club leaders, and other personnel took time during the Charger Connection class to speak to freshmen students about their specific areas of expertise. Freshmen students were introduced to using the media center materials through a scavenger hunt and practiced using the computer labs. Students were also given a detailed tour of the building.

Elkhart Memorial High School is set up on the 8-block schedule, where four classes meet one day (90 minutes for each class), and on the opposite day another four classes meet. One of the 8-blocks is utilized for study time; we call this Success Period. The Charger Connection classes met during the first 45 minutes of Success Period. There were seven "freshmen only" Success Period homerooms, which became the Charger Connection classes.

Teachers used the Charger Connection class to develop a relationship with members of the class. Class size was kept small--about 16 students in each class. Teachers checked on students' grades and progress in all their classes. They helped students learn to use their student handbook and to organize themselves. The teachers and students developed into a "team."

Research Question

As with any "innovative program, school personnel are encouraged to evaluate and fine tune the effectiveness of the transition program they develop" (Hertzog and Morgan 30). A measure of the effectiveness of the Charger Connection class became necessary.

Developing a Measure of Effectiveness

In collaboration with a mentor, Mrs. Rost and Mrs. Royer designed several methods of gathering information and evaluating the Charger Connection class.

- Gather data from the student database on incidents of student disciplinary actions, tardies, and absences to see if Charger Connection class was effective in helping student behavior.

- Use a Likert scale survey of the entire freshman class to compare information from the control group (freshmen students not in Charger Connection) with students in the experimental group (freshmen students in Charger Connection).
- Use of a qualitative survey to gain feedback from the teachers of Charger Connection (who taught without remuneration).
- Use of a qualitative survey to gather reactions from the Charger Connection students.

Quantitative Survey - Disciplinary Record Search

The quantitative survey on disciplinary referrals highlighted freshmen students with at least three notations of disciplinary actions in their files. The disciplinary actions could be detentions due to two tardies, excessive absences (6 absences in one class), insubordination, dress code violations, arguments, etc. 68% of the freshmen students not in Charger Connection class had three or more such disciplinary referrals. On the other hand, only 38% of the students in Charger Connection had three or more notations of disciplinary actions.

Quantitative Survey - All Freshman Students

In our Likert survey, students were given the choice of five responses to fourteen questions. Choices included: strongly agree, agree, no opinion, disagree, and strongly disagree. The table below is a compilation of students' "agree" and "strongly agree" responses. A graph showing the results of the freshmen survey, comparing the results from the Charger Connection responses can be found in the Appendix B. (Copies of the surveys can be found in Appendix C following this paper.) In 13 of the 14 questions,

students in Charger Connection had a more positive response than students not in Charger Connection.

	Connection	Freshman
It was easy to "make the move" to high school	77%	72%
I like attending Memorial High School	79%	64%
I have close friends that attend Memorial	89%	84%
Involved in extra-curricular activities (could mark more than 1)	124%	64%
Average grades first term C and above	97%	81%
Grades were the same or better than last year	77%	73%
I would feel free to talk to any of Memorial's administrators	50%	41%
I could find the activities office	85%	74%
I could find the guidance office	92%	87%
I feel comfortable finding materials in the media center	76%	46%
I have found my student planner helpful	43%	40%
I feel my first semester has been successful	52%	36%
I have set goals for my high school & beyond graduation	81%	54%
I feel my transition to high school went well	77%	64%
I look forward to coming to school	35%	36%

Four areas in which Charger Connection students responded overwhelmingly positive included: use of the media center, participation in extra curricular activities, goal-setting, and a good transition to high school. Out of the 14 questions, the only conflicting result occurred with the control group of freshmen students looking forward to school more than Charger Connection students.

Qualitative Survey - Charger Connection Students

The qualitative surveys to the Charger Connection students asked for subjective, written responses. The questions asked were open-ended. A copy of the survey can be found in the Appendix. The survey results showed:

- 97% of the Charger Connections students said the Charger Connection class was helpful to them;
- 72% said information on Memorial High School was the most helpful to them;
- 55% of the students said they would recommend Charger Connection for students entering high school next fall.

Several students wrote that the first few weeks were especially fun and helpful. As stated directly from a student survey, "It was fun the first week and helpful." Students said Charger Connection "helped me find my way around." Every student but one had positive and unique responses on what they liked best about the Charger Connection class.

However, several students made additional comments regarding recommendations for changes to improve the pilot program. Of the Charger Connection students, 63% said that the Charger Connection class conflicted with their Success Period. As stated by one Charger Connection student, "I have band things and contest that I need to practice for but the people I'm doing it with are free first half only." Students also stated that they needed to travel to see other teachers and could not get their homework finished when they had the class instead of their regular Success Period. As shown, "We couldn't go to as many classes as we wanted to and couldn't stay as long as I needed to." Of the 98 Charger Connection students who commented on the major problem they encountered with the Charger Connection class, 71 students said they didn't have time to do their homework, work on projects, and they couldn't travel to teachers from whom they needed to get help. As described by one student, "Some days when I need the time to study or do my homework the teacher (Charger Connection) already had something planned for us."

Only 10 students responded that the lessons were boring or not helpful. Those negative responses from students can be summarized by this individual's comment, "Too boring. We could have learned what we did in half the time!"

Qualitative Survey - Charger Connection Teachers

Teachers, in their survey comments, relayed they had concentrated on teaching responsibility, time management, organization, courtesy, and respect. All of the teachers of Charger Connection felt the class had been effective in providing a positive transition for freshmen. Teachers felt that the orientation lessons were the most helpful to the students. Also having an all freshman Success Period, giving a tour of the school, and doing grade checks were elements that helped students make a positive transition. Although teachers had to get the information for grade checks on their own time, they felt that grade checks were helpful in monitoring students' academic progress. Some suggestions that teachers made were:

- "Some students really needed the time to visit teachers."
- " This does not belong in Success Period. The kids want time to see their teachers, and as teachers, we need to be free to help our students."
- "I question whether the entire first semester is essential, or if the first nine weeks would be better."

Teachers felt as if revisions in the curriculum were necessary. They wanted the activities to be more interactive and relevant. They also felt scheduling of the lessons could be better planned. The biggest problem teachers faced were student apathy and the scheduling of the class during Success Period. Although all seven teachers had

suggestions for improvement, four would volunteer to teacher Charger Connection next year.

Discussion of Findings

1. Students in Charger Connection had approximately half as many disciplinary problems as freshman students not in Charger Connection.
2. Charger Connection students overall made a positive transition to high school. This was the major goal of Charger Connection. That was accomplished. It was especially seen in students' ability to work well in the media center, to be goal-setters, and to get involved in extra-curricular activities at school.
3. In the qualitative information gathered from the students and teachers, there were definite patterns to which both groups agreed. Both teachers and students felt as if some revision needed to be made in the curriculum to make it more relevant and interesting. Both groups also indicated that utilizing Success Period, or so much time of Success Period, for Charger Connection was not helpful for the students.

Recommendations

Clearly, results from all quantitative and qualitative surveys indicate that Charger Connection has been helpful for student success. Charger Connection has been effective in helping students make a positive transition from middle school to Elkhart Memorial High School. Students in Charger Connection have fewer disciplinary actions, are involved in more extra-curricular activities, and overall have a more positive and confident first semester experience in high school. It appears that part of the reason for the success of student transition is due to small, all freshman homeroom (Success Period) classes. Also, Charger Connection teachers check students' progress on grades in other

classes. This was often mentioned as a valuable tool for teachers, while also stressing accountability in students. Some protocol needs to be implemented to help teachers get this grade information easily. As it is currently, teachers must go into the counselor's office and individually gather grade information. Volunteer teachers are already taking up time from other responsibilities preparing and teaching Charger Connection. They really do not have time to gather student grade progress.

From the results of the surveys, improvements need to be made in two major areas:

- The scheduling of the Charger Connection class and
- Revision to interactive and relevant activities for the Charger Connection class.

The Charger Connection class schedule could be changed several ways. One way would be to make Charger Connection a required class that meets for one semester during the class day. Most teachers and students would agree that one semester would be too long for Charger Connection unless it was integrated with some other class. Another idea would be to have a freshmen only first day of school. Worthington, Ohio, Kilbourne High School, parents "consistently praise the freshmen-only first day of school" as an effective tool in easing the transition for freshmen (Lindsay 62).

Currently, the best option would be to continue use of Success Period for Charger Connection. However, students and teachers should be given a schedule of what lessons will be presented and the date they will be offered. Students can adjust their traveling schedule and homework accordingly. Since orientation-type lessons seemed to be most

valuable to students, the first two weeks of Success Period should be utilized exclusively for that objective.

From the Charger Connection Syllabus, lessons appear to be relevant. However, mention was consistently made from students and teachers that lessons were not interesting, well planned, or hands-on. Lessons should be reviewed and revised to make them more detailed and interactive. These prepared lessons should be given to teachers before the class begins. It will then become easier to plan a definite schedule for proper use of the Success Period or classroom time to help both students and teachers.

Charger Connection is a valuable and effective tool for student success. Charger Connection has been effective in helping some freshmen students make an easier transition from middle school to high school. It seems to be so effective, that Charger Connection needs to be expanded to include all freshmen, as the curriculum is refined and developed.

Works Cited

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Appendix A

CHARGER CONNECTION SYLLABUS

The following is a list of topics that were covered during the Charger Connection Sessions.

1. **Who's Who at EMHS:**
   - Hand-out with pictures of "main" people in building. Example: Principals, Counselors, Activities Director, Athletics. Used questionnaire helping students decide which person to see if a problem arose.

2. **Tour of the Building:**
   - Although students had walked through the building during orientation, the Charger Connection tour was done in groups of 20 with special attention to Cafeteria, Bookstore, Offices, etc.

3. **Library Visit:**
   - Introduced the students to the library computers, resources, set-up, etc. The classes visited on two different occasions using a scavenger hunt format.

4. **Computer Labs:**
   - This lesson focus was helping students become familiar with the programs and procedures in the computer labs.

5. **Student Planner:**
   - Showed the students ways to use their handbook/planner in a positive manner.

6. **Club Fair.**

7. **School History.**

8. **School Spirit Week.**

9. **Junior Colleges/Associates Degree.**

10. **Athletics:**
    - Introduction of all the available athletic teams at EMHS. This was a large group format meeting.

11. **Speaker on Dating Violence.**

12. **Social Skills.**
    - How to handle difficult situations, body language, dealing with adults, etc.

13. **Group Work:**
    - This lesson covered various roles fulfilled by students during group work along with the responsibilities of group members.

14. Time Management Panel.

- This was a series of 10 lessons geared toward study skills, time management, and long-term planning and goal-setting.

15. Career Center Tour.

16. Administrators Meeting.

- Individual administrators met with each class.

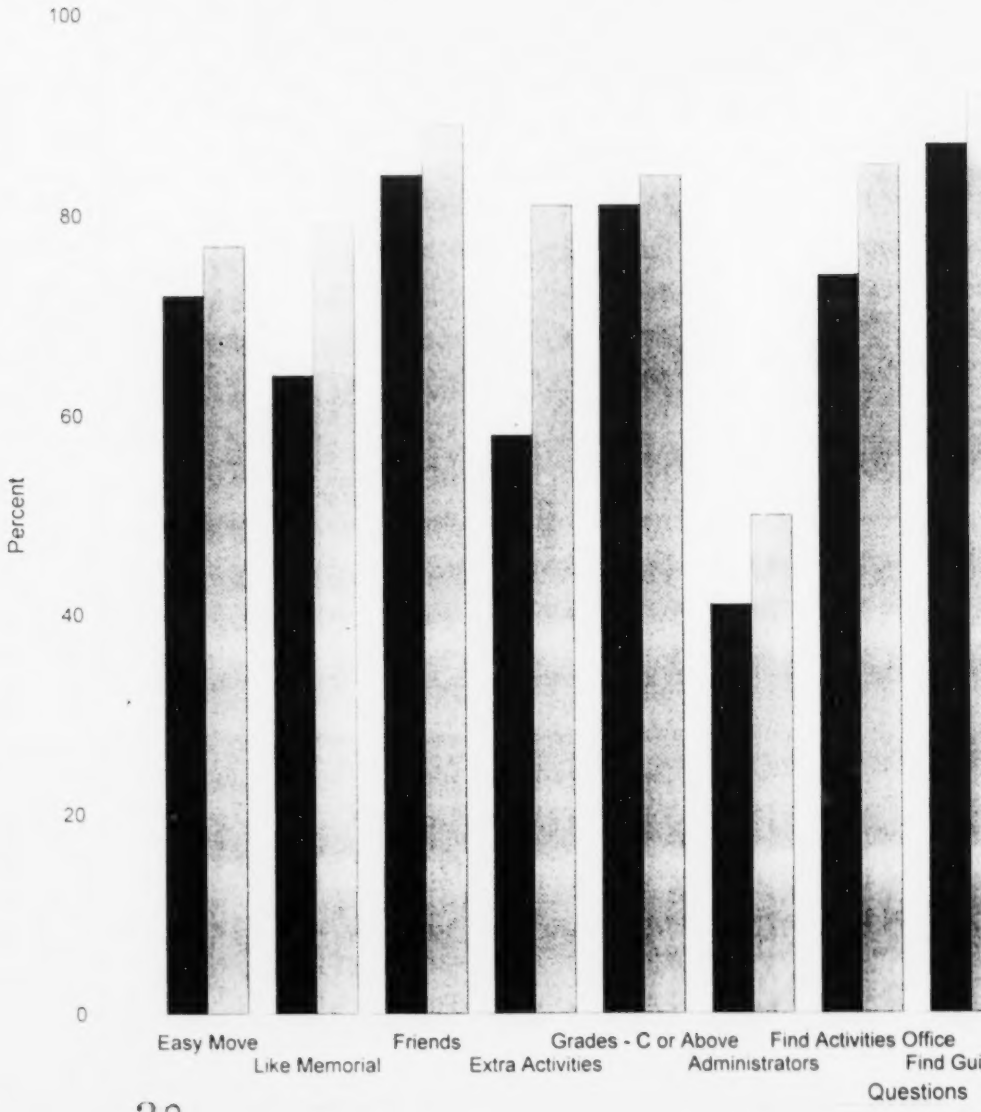
17. Counselors Meeting.

18. Silent Reading.

Appendix B

Freshmen Survey R

Charger Connect



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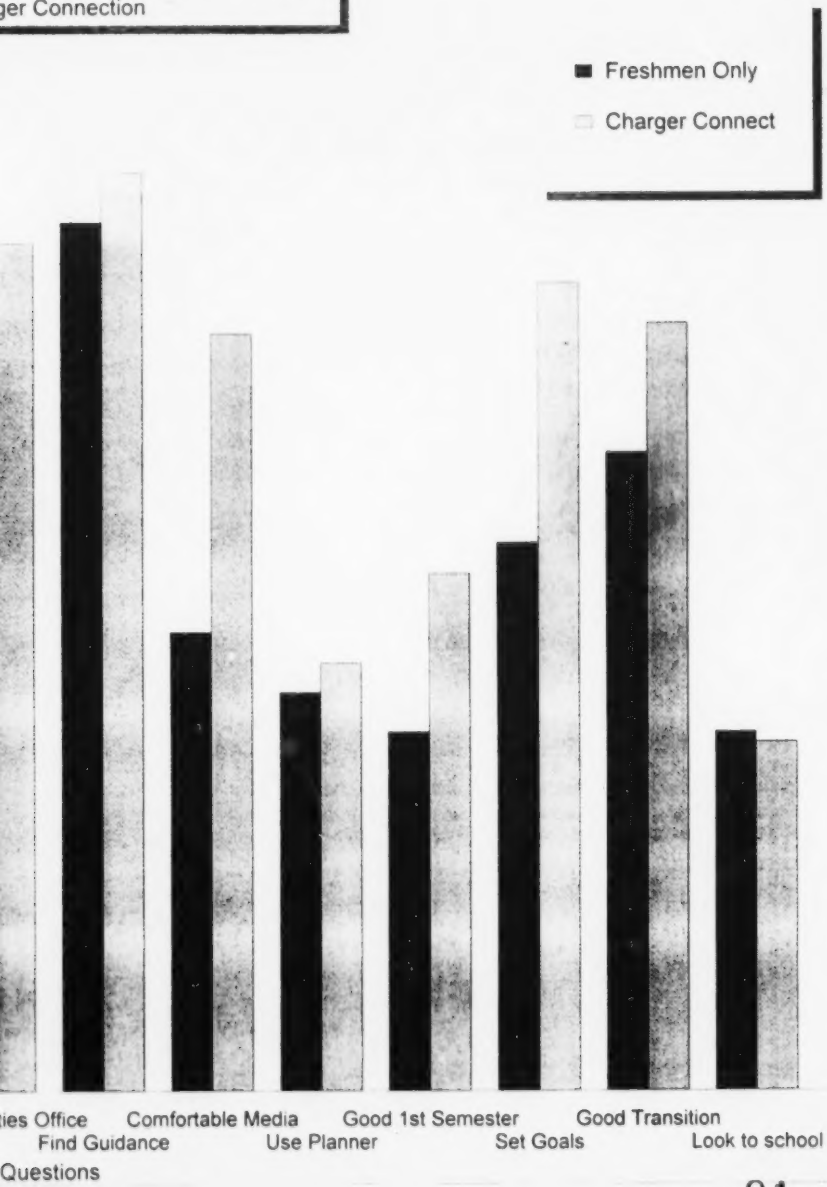
ger Connection



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Appendix C

Student Survey
Freshman Class

Please complete this survey and return it immediately. We would appreciate any specific comments you can give us. You can continue your answers on the back of this sheet, if necessary. Please circle the response that best reflects your opinion.

1. Please tell us a little bit about yourself.
   a. It was easy to "make the move" to high school.
   Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree

   b. I like attending Memorial High School.
   Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree

   c. I have close friends that attend Memorial.
   Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree

   d. What extra-curricular activities or clubs are you involved in or attend? (Circle all that apply)
   Drama Music Athletics
   Clubs Student Government Other _____

   e. What were the average grades you received the first grading period at Memorial High School? (approximate grade point average)
   A B C D F

   f. Were these grades better, worse, or about the same as those you received at your last school?
   Better Same Worse

2. I would feel free talking to any of the Memorial High School administrators?
   Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree
   Comments:_____

3. I could find the activities office.
   Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree
   Comments:_____

4. I could find the guidance office.
   Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree
   Comments:_____

Charger Connection
Student Survey

Name (optional) _____

Please complete and return this survey immediately. We would appreciate any specific comments you can give us. You can continue answers on the back of this sheet, if necessary. PLEASE CIRCLE THE RESPONSE THAT BEST REFLECTS YOUR OPINION.

1. How has your Charger Connection teacher been helpful?
   a. Made me feel more comfortable in high school
   b. Taught helpful lessons about social skills
   c. Answered questions about EMHS
   d. Encouraged me with my grades
   e. Made me study
   f. Not at all

2. What have you learned in your Charger connection class that has been most helpful?
   a. Social Skills
   b. Study Skills
   c. Information about Memorial High School

3. Do you have any friends in your Charger Connection class?
   Yes No

4. I would recommend the Charger Connection class for students entering Memorial next fall.
Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

5. The Charger Connection class has conflicted with my activities or studies during success period.
Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____
_____

6. What was the major problem that you encountered during your Charger Connection class?
_____
_____

7. What did you like best about the Charger Connection class?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Teacher Survey
Charger Connection

Please take a few minutes of your time to respond to this survey. We appreciate the time and effort you have given to the freshman students to help them adjust to life at Memorial. The more specific your comments, the more useful this survey will be. You may continue your answers on the back of this paper, if necessary. Please circle the response that best reflects your opinions.

1. What specific social skills have you helped to develop in your Charger Connection students? (You may circle more than one response.)
   a. courtesy/respect
   b. responsibility
   c. organization
   d. discipline
   e. time management
   f. study skills

Comments: _____

_____

A. The Charger Connection class has been effective in teaching students courtesy/respect.

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

_____

B. The Charger Connection class has been effective in teaching students responsibility.

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

_____

C. The Charger Connection class has been effective in teaching students organizational skills.

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

_____

D. The Charger Connection class has been effective in teaching students discipline.

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

_____

E. The Charger Connection class has been effective in teaching students time management.

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

_____

F. The Charger Connection class has been effective in teaching students study skills.

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

_____

2. The Charger Connection class has been effective in providing a positive transition for freshman entering Memorial High School.

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

3. What do you feel has been helpful to your Charger connection students in making a positive transition to high school? (You may circle more than one response.)

a. all freshman success period
b. tour of school
c. grade checks
d. orientation type lessons
e. skill building lessons

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

4. The Charger Connection class has been effective in introducing students to school organizations.

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

5. The Charger Connection class has been effective in introducing students to school personnel and administration.

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

6. The Charger Connection class has been effective in teaching students to use the media/technology centers.

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

7. The Charger Connection class has been effective in helping students find the gym, offices, media center, classrooms, etc.

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

8. The Charger Connection class has been effective in encouraging students to use their student planners.
Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

9. The Charger Connection class has been effective in teaching students how to set goals.

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

10. The Charger Connection class has been effective in helping students learn how to set career goals.

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

_____

11. The Charger Connection class provides valuable use of Success Period during the first semester of the freshman year.

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

_____

12. The Charger Connection class provided an opportunity for you to monitor your students' academic progress.

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

_____

13. The Charger Connection class provided an opportunity for you to personally get to know your Charger Connection students.

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

_____

14. What change in management and organization might make the Charger Connection class more effective?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

15. What were the biggest problems you confronted in your Charger Connection class?

_____

_____

_____

_____

16. Provided my schedule does not change, I would volunteer to teach the Charger Connection class again.

Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree Unsure
Comments: _____

_____